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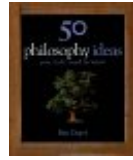
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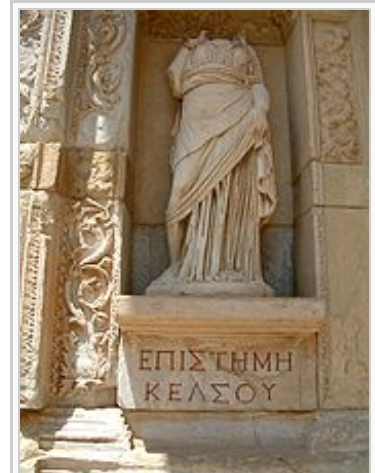
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## Knowledge

**Knowledge** is defined by the [Oxford English Dictionary](#) as (i) expertise, and skills acquired by a person through experience or education; the theoretical or practical understanding of a subject; (ii) what is known in a particular field or in total; facts and information; or (iii) awareness or familiarity gained by experience of a fact or situation. Philosophical debates in general start with [Plato's](#) formulation of knowledge as "justified true belief." There is however no single agreed definition of knowledge presently, nor any prospect of one, and there remain numerous competing theories. Knowledge acquisition involves complex [cognitive](#) processes: perception, learning, communication, association and [reasoning](#). The term *knowledge* is also used to mean the confident [understanding](#) of a subject with the ability to use it for a specific purpose if appropriate. See [knowledge management](#) for additional details on that discipline.



Personification of knowledge ([Greek](#) *Επιστήμη*, [Episteme](#)) in [Celsus Library](#) in [Ephesus](#), Turkey.

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# Defining knowledge (philosophy)

See also: [epistemology](#)

“

We suppose ourselves to possess unqualified scientific knowledge of a thing, as opposed to knowing it in the accidental way in which the [sophist](#) knows, when we think that we know the cause on which the fact depends, as the cause of that fact and of no other, and, further, that the fact could not be other than it is. Now that scientific knowing is something of this sort is evident — witness both those who falsely claim it and those who actually possess it, since the former merely imagine themselves to be, while the latter are also actually, in the condition described. Consequently the proper object of unqualified scientific knowledge is something which cannot be other than it is.

”

— [Aristotle](#), *Posterior Analytics* (Book 1 Part 2)



[Robert Reid](#), *Knowledge* (1896). [Thomas Jefferson Building](#), Washington, D.C.

The definition of knowledge is a matter of on-going [debate](#) among [philosophers](#) in the field of [epistemology](#). The classical definition, described but not ultimately endorsed by [Plato](#) <sup>[1]</sup>, specifies that a [statement](#) must meet three [criteria](#) in order to be considered knowledge: it must be [justified](#), [true](#), and [believed](#). Some claim that these conditions are not sufficient, as [Gettier case](#) examples allegedly demonstrate. There are a number of alternatives proposed, including [Robert Nozick's](#) arguments for a requirement that knowledge 'tracks the truth' and [Simon Blackburn's](#) additional requirement that we do not want to say that those who meet any of these conditions 'through a defect, flaw, or failure' have knowledge. [Richard Kirkham](#) suggests that our definition of knowledge requires that the belief is self-evident to the believer.<sup>[2]</sup>

In contrast to this approach, [Wittgenstein](#) observed, following [Moore's paradox](#), that one can say "He believes it, but it isn't so", but not "He knows it, but it isn't so". <sup>[3]</sup> He goes on to argue that these do not correspond to distinct mental states, but rather to distinct ways of talking about conviction. What is different here is not the mental state of the speaker, but the activity in which they are engaged. For example, on this account, to *know* that the kettle is boiling is not to be in a particular state of mind, but to perform a particular task with the statement that the kettle is boiling. Wittgenstein sought to bypass the difficulty of definition by looking to the way "knowledge" is used in natural languages. He saw knowledge as a case of a [family resemblance](#). Following this idea, "knowledge" has been reconstructed as a cluster concept that points out relevant features but that is not adequately captured by any definition.<sup>[4]</sup>

## Communicating knowledge

[Symbolic representations](#) can be used to indicate meaning and can be thought of as a dynamic process. Hence the transfer of the symbolic representation can be viewed as one [ascription](#) process whereby knowledge can be transferred. Other forms of communication include imitation, narrative exchange along with a range of other methods. There is no complete theory of knowledge transfer or communication.<sup>[citation needed]</sup>

While many would agree that one of the most universal and significant tools for the transfer of knowledge is writing (of many kinds), argument over the usefulness of the written word exists however, with some scholars skeptical of its impact on societies. In his collection of essays [Technopoly](#) Neil Postman demonstrates the argument against the use of writing through an excerpt from Plato's work [Phaedrus](#) (Postman, Neil (1992) *Technopoly*, Vintage, New York, pp 73). In this excerpt the scholar [Socrates](#) recounts the story of Thamus, the Egyptian king and Theuth the inventor of the written word. In this story, Theuth presents his new invention "writing" to King Thamus, telling Thamus that his new invention "will improve both the wisdom and memory of the Egyptians" (Postman, Neil (1992) *Technopoly*, Vintage, New York, pp 74). King Thamus is skeptical of this new invention and rejects it as a tool of recollection rather than retained knowledge. He argues that the written word will infect the Egyptian people with fake knowledge as they will be able to attain facts and stories from an external source and will no longer be forced to mentally retain large quantities of knowledge themselves (Postman, Neil (1992) *Technopoly*, Vintage, New York, pp 74).

Andrew Robinson also highlights, in his work *The Origins of Writing*, the possibility for writing to be used to spread false information and therefore the ability of the written word to decrease social knowledge (Robinson, Andrew (2003) *The Origins of Writing* in Crowley and Heyer (eds) *Communication in History: Technology, Culture, Society*, Boston pp 34). People are often internalizing new information which they perceive to be knowledge but in reality fill their minds with false knowledge.

## Situated knowledge

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Situated knowledge is knowledge specific to a particular situation.<sup>[[citation needed](#)]</sup>

Some methods of generating knowledge, such as [trial and error](#), or learning from [experience](#), tend to create highly situational knowledge. One of the main benefits of the [scientific method](#) is that the theories it generates are much less situational than knowledge gained by other methods.<sup>[[citation needed](#)]</sup> Situational knowledge is often embedded in language, culture, or traditions.<sup>[[citation needed](#)]</sup>

Knowledge generated through experience is called knowledge "a posteriori", meaning afterwards. The pure existence of a term like "a posteriori" means this also has a counterpart. In this case that is knowledge "a priori", meaning before. The knowledge prior to any experience means that there are certain "assumptions" that one takes for granted. For example if you are being told about a [chair](#) it is clear to you that the chair is in [space](#), that it is [3D](#). This knowledge is not knowledge that one can "forget", even someone suffering from amnesia experiences the world in 3D. See also: [a priori and a posteriori](#).<sup>[[citation needed](#)]</sup>

## Partial knowledge

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One discipline of [epistemology](#) focuses on partial knowledge. In most realistic cases, it is not possible to have an exhaustive understanding of an information domain, so then we have to live with the fact that our knowledge is always *not complete*, that is, partial. Most real problems have to be solved by taking advantage of a partial understanding of the problem context and problem data. That is very different from the typical simple maths problems one might solve at school, where all data is given and one has a perfect



understanding of formulas necessary to solve them.<sup>[citation needed]</sup>

This idea is also present in the concept of [bounded rationality](#) which assumes that in real life situations people often have a limited amount of information and make decisions accordingly.

## Scientific knowledge

The development of the [scientific method](#) has made a significant contribution to our understanding of knowledge. To be termed scientific, a method of [inquiry](#) must be based on gathering [observable](#), [empirical](#) and [measurable evidence](#) subject to specific principles of [reasoning](#).<sup>[5]</sup> The scientific method consists of the collection of [data](#) through [observation](#) and [experimentation](#), and the formulation and testing of [hypotheses](#).<sup>[6]</sup> Science, and the nature of scientific knowledge have also become the subject of [Philosophy](#). As science itself has developed, knowledge has developed a broader usage which has been developing within biology/psychology—discussed elsewhere as [meta-epistemology](#), or [genetic epistemology](#), and to some extent related to "[theory of cognitive development](#)".

Note that "[epistemology](#)" is the study of knowledge and how it is acquired. Science is "the process used everyday to logically complete thoughts through inference of facts determined by calculated experiments." [Sir Francis Bacon](#), critical in the historical development of the scientific method, his works established and popularized an inductive methodology for scientific inquiry. His famous aphorism, "[knowledge is power](#)", is found in the *Meditations Sacrae* (1597).<sup>[7]</sup>

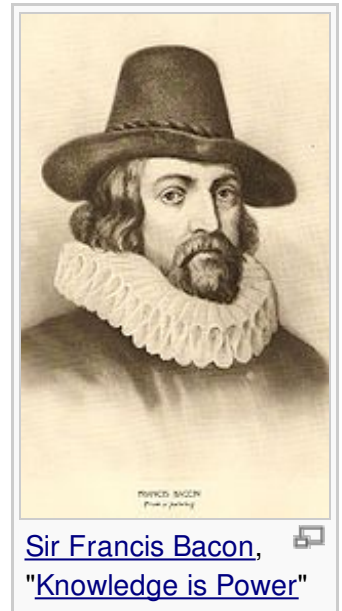
Until recent times, at least in the Western tradition, it was simply taken for granted that knowledge was something possessed only by humans — and probably *adult* humans at that. Sometimes the notion might stretch to (ii) *Society-as-such*, as in (e.g.) "the knowledge possessed by the Coptic culture" (as opposed to its individual members), but that was not assured either. Nor was it usual to consider *unconscious* knowledge in any systematic way until this approach was popularized by [Freud](#).<sup>[8]</sup>

Other biological domains where "knowledge" might be said to reside, include: (iii) the *immune system*, and (iv) in the *DNA of the genetic code*. See the list of four "epistemological domains": [Popper](#), (1975)<sup>[9]</sup>; and Traill (2008 <sup>[1]</sup> : Table S, page 31)—also references by both to [Niels Jerne](#).

Such considerations seem to call for a separate definition of "knowledge" to cover the biological systems. For biologists, knowledge must be usefully *available* to the system, though that system need not be conscious. Thus the criteria seem to be:

- The system should apparently be dynamic and self-organizing (unlike a mere book *on its own*).
- The knowledge must constitute some sort of representation of "the outside world"<sup>[10]</sup>, or ways of dealing with it (directly or indirectly).
- There must be some way for the system to access this information quickly enough for it to be useful.

Scientific knowledge may not involve a claim to [certainty](#), maintaining [skepticism](#) means that a scientist



will never be absolutely certain when they are correct and when they are not. It is thus an irony of proper [scientific method](#) that one must doubt even when correct, in the hopes that this practice will lead to greater convergence on the [truth](#) in general.<sup>[11]</sup>

## Religious meaning of knowledge

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In many expressions of [Christianity](#), such as [Catholicism](#) and [Anglicanism](#), knowledge is one of the [seven gifts of the Holy Spirit](#).<sup>[12]</sup>

In Islam, knowledge (Arabic: علم, *ʿilm*) is given great significance. "The All-Knowing" (*al-ʿAlīm*) is one of the [99 names](#) reflecting distinct attributes of [God](#). The [Qur'an](#) asserts that knowledge comes from God ([2:239](#) ) and various [hadith](#) encourage the acquisition of knowledge. [Muhammad](#) is reported to have said "Seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave" and "Verily the men of knowledge are the inheritors of the prophets". Islamic scholars, theologians and jurists are often given the title [alim](#), meaning "knowledgable".<sup>[citation needed]</sup>

Hindu Scriptures present two kinds of knowledge, *Paroksha Gnyana* and *Aporoksha Gnyana*. *Paroksha Gnyana* (also spelled *Paroksha-Jnana*) is secondhand knowledge: knowledge obtained from books, hearsay, etc. *Aporoksha Gnyana* (also spelled *Aparoksha-Jnana*) is the knowledge borne of direct experience, i.e., knowledge that one discovers for oneself.<sup>[13]</sup>

The [Old Testament](#)'s [tree of the knowledge of good and evil](#) contained the knowledge that separated Man from God: "And the LORD God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil..." ([Genesis 3:22](#) )

In [Gnosticism](#) divine knowledge or [gnosis](#) is hoped to be attained and escape from the [demiurge](#)'s physical world. And in [Thelema](#) knowledge and conversation with one's Holy Guardian Angel is the purpose of life, which is similar to Gnosis or enlightenment in other mystery religions.

## See also

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- [Analytic-synthetic distinction](#)
- [Descriptive knowledge](#)
- [Epistemic logic](#)
- [Epistemology](#) (theory of knowledge)
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- [Figurative system of human knowledge](#)
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- [Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge](#)
- [Scientia potentia est/](#) (knowledge is power)
- [Tacit knowledge](#)

- [Berlin Declaration on Open Access to Knowledge in the Sciences and Humanities](#)
- [Wisdom](#)
- Hard knowledge and Soft knowledge

## Notes

1. <sup>^</sup> In Plato's *Theaetetus*, Socrates and Theaetetus discuss three definitions of *knowledge*: knowledge as nothing but perception, knowledge as true judgment, and, finally, knowledge as a true judgment with an account. Each of these definitions is shown to be unsatisfactory.
2. <sup>^</sup> <http://www.centenary.edu/attachments/philosophy/aizawa/courses/epistemologyf2008/kirkham1984.pdf>
3. <sup>^</sup> [Ludwig Wittgenstein](#), *On Certainty*, remark 42
4. <sup>^</sup> Gottschalk-Mazouz, N. (2008): „Internet and the flow of knowledge“, in: Hrachovec, H.; Pichler, A. (Hg.): *Philosophy of the Information Society*. Proceedings of the 30. International Ludwig Wittgenstein Symposium Kirchberg am Wechsel, Austria 2007. Volume 2, Frankfurt, Paris, Lancaster, New Brunswick: Ontos, S. 215-232.  
<http://www.uni-stuttgart.de/philo/fileadmin/doc/pdf/gottschalk/ngm-internetflow-2008.pdf>
5. <sup>^</sup> [4] Rules for the study of [natural philosophy](#), [Newton 1999](#), pp. 794-6, from the [General Scholium](#), which follows Book 3, *The System of the World*.
6. <sup>^</sup> [scientific method](#) , *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*.
7. <sup>^</sup> ["Sir Francis Bacon - Quotationspage.com"](#) . <http://www.quotationspage.com/quote/2060.html> . Retrieved 2009-07-08.
8. <sup>^</sup> There is quite a good case for this exclusive specialization used by philosophers, in that it allows for in-depth study of logic-procedures and other abstractions which are not found elsewhere. However this may lead to problems whenever the topic spills over into those excluded domains—e.g. when Kant (following Newton) dismissed *Space and Time* as axiomatically "transcendental" and "a priori" — a claim later disproved by [Piaget's](#) clinical studies. It also seems likely that the vexed problem of "[infinite regress](#)" can be largely (but not completely) solved by proper attention to how unconscious concepts are *actually* developed, both during infantile learning *and* as inherited "pseudo-transcendentals" inherited from the trial-and-error of previous generations. See also "[Tacit knowledge](#)".
  - [Piaget, J.](#), and B.Inhelder (1927 / 1969). *The child's conception of time*. Routledge & Kegan Paul: London.
  - [Piaget, J.](#), and B.Inhelder (1948 / 1956). *The child's conception of space*. Routledge & Kegan Paul: London.
9. <sup>^</sup> [Popper, K.R.](#) (1975). "The rationality of scientific revolutions"; in Rom Harré (ed.), *Problems of Scientific Revolution: Scientific Progress and Obstacles to Progress in the Sciences*. Clarendon Press: Oxford.
10. <sup>^</sup> This "outside world" could include other subsystems within the same organism—e.g. different "mental levels" corresponding to different Piagetian stages. See [Theory of cognitive development](#).
11. <sup>^</sup> <http://philosophybites.com/2007/12/barry-stroud-on.html>
12. <sup>^</sup> ["Part Three, No. 1831"](#) . *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. <http://www.scborromeo.org/ccc/p3s1c1a7.htm#1831> . Retrieved 2007-04-20.
13. <sup>^</sup> [Swami Krishnananda](#). "[Chapter 7](#)" . *The Philosophy of the Panchadasi*. The Divine Life Society. [http://www.swami-krishnananda.org/panch/panch\\_07.html](http://www.swami-krishnananda.org/panch/panch_07.html) . Retrieved 2008-07-05.

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